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UNCLAS HARARE 001022

SIPDIS

AF/PD FOR COX AND ROBERTSON, AF/S FOR KRAFT AND
SCHLACHTER, AF/RA FOR DIPALMA, INR/R/MR, NSC FOR
JENDAYI FRAZER

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: GOVERNMENT-OWNED MEDIA CRITICIZED

REF: HARARE 00956

1. Under the title "Journalism in government media has gone to the dogs," the independent daily "The Daily News" April 26 editorial criticizes the Government of Zimbabwe's apparent double standard in applying its draconian media control laws. The editorial points out that state-owned media are free to publish outlandish fabrications, while independent press face constant harassment even for factual reports.
2. A telling example of this double standard appeared on April 22 and 23 when the government-owned daily "Chronicle" published back-to-back front-page reports that surely violated Zimbabwean law against publishing "falsehoods" or stories that cause "fear, alarm and despondency." On April 22 the Chronicle ran a front-page story article accusing the opposition Movement of Democratic Change (MDC) of "planning a massive terrorist attack. coordinated by a 'political affairs' officer at the U.S. Embassy. to invoke civil unrest and pave way for military intervention by Britain and the U.S." (see reftel). On April 22, the paper ran a follow-up story claiming that "at least 400 opposition MDC terrorists" infiltrated Zimbabwe during the run up to the March presidential poll.
3. The "Daily News" April 26 editorial makes the following observations:

"On several occasions over the past 18 months or so, journalists in the country's privately owned Press have been arrested and detained on spurious charges of publishing falsehoods. More recently, alleged breaching of a section of the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act have been cited as the basis for the arrests of media practitioners - arrests which, incidentally, have become more frequent. . . We must note here that the law in question infringes upon the people's right to freedom of expression guaranteed in the Constitution of Zimbabwe and enshrined in the Universal Bill of Rights. . . That fact notwithstanding, it is its skewed application which has become a source of grave concern and dismay among the journalistic fraternity. It is those who publish the truth who get arrested for no other reason than that the truth they publish makes government uncomfortable. On the other hand, those in the State-controlled media who routinely publish, not just minor falsehoods, but complete fabrications, are left to go scot-free because, apart from tarnishing the image of its 'enemies,' those falsehoods are what the government would like to hear.

". . .The 'Chronicle' this week decided to outdo its stablemates by publishing its own incredibly fictitious story. . .the whole story is, of course, utter balderdash, and shows how journalism at the State-controlled media has gone to the dogs. We, therefore, seriously expect the police to move swiftly against both the writer and the paper's editor because, as must be clear to any right-thinking person, the story is not only a fabrication, but is likely to cause much fear, alarm and despondency. If they fail to move against the paper, they will have forever forfeited their authority to move against anyone in connection with publishing falsehoods real or imaginary."

SULLIVAN